Complementary and alternative medicine (update 2015)

https://policybase.cma.ca/link/policy11529

POLICY TYPE	Policy document
DATE	2015-05-30
REPLACES	Complementary and alternative medicine (Update 2008)
TOPICS	Health care and patient safety Pharmaceuticals, prescribing, cannabis, drugs

Documents

CMA POLICY

COMPLEMENTARY AND ALTERNATIVE MEDICINE
(Update 2015)

This statement discusses the Canadian Medical Association's (CMA) position on complementary and alternative medicine (CAM). CAM, widely used in Canada, is increasingly being subject to regulation. The CMA's position is based on the fundamental premise that decisions about health care interventions used in Canada should be based on sound scientific evidence as to their safety, efficacy and effectiveness – the same standard by which physicians and all other elements of the health care system should be assessed. Patients deserve the highest standard of treatment available, and physicians, other health practitioners, manufacturers, regulators and researchers should all work toward this end. All elements of the health care system should "consider first the well-being of the patient."[1] The ethical principle of non-maleficence obliges physicians to reduce their patient's risks of harm. Physicians must constantly strive to balance the potential benefits of an intervention against its potential side effects, harms or burdens. To help physicians meet this obligation, patients should inform their physician if the patient uses CAM.

CAM in Canada

CAM has been defined as "a group of diverse medical and health care systems, practices and products that are not presently considered to be part of conventional medicine." This definition comprises a great many different, otherwise unrelated products, therapies and devices, with varying origins and levels of supporting scientific evidence. For the purpose of this analysis, the CMA divides CAM into four general categories:

- Diagnostic Tests: Provided by CAM practitioners. Unknown are the toxicity levels or the source of test material, e.g., purity. Clinical sensitivity, specificity, and predictive value should be evidence-based.
- Products: Herbal and other remedies are widely available over-the-counter at pharmacies and health food stores. In Canada these are regulated at the federal level under the term Natural Health Products.

1 Working definition used by the National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine of the U.S. National Institutes of Health.